

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 10, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Leader McConnell:

We write to request that the next bill to address the COVID-19 pandemic include health and safety protections for frontline workers who are likely to be exposed to COVID-19 on the job. Frontline workers are essential in curbing COVID-19 and caring for our most vulnerable and heavily impacted communities, and these workers – including healthcare workers and other frontline workers - deserve to work under the safest possible procedures and conditions.

Frontline healthcare workers face special risks and Congress must prioritize providing these workers with appropriate health and safety protections. In areas of the country hard hit by a surge in COVID-19 patients, frontline workers have been caring for our communities non-stop. However, due to the shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), many facilities have had to conserve PPE in short supply and prioritize the use of maximally protective equipment for staff performing high-risk medical procedures. As a result of these contingency plans, many facilities have had to deviate from standard practice, leaving frontline workers at increased risk for exposure. Additionally, with the constantly evolving situation, information to employees about best practices has been changing frequently.

We have seen that 15 percent of new cases of COVID-19 in Spain have been in healthcare workers, and that is exactly what we need to guard against here.<sup>1</sup> Our communities will continue to be at risk if our frontline health care workers continue to fall ill, sometimes from exposure at work, and potentially transmit this illness to their outside contacts, co-workers and patients. These workers' exposure and illness will lead to understaffed hospital systems and facilities.

However, there is no current standardized guidance for these healthcare workers on how to protect their own safety and health. STAT reported that level of preparedness varies from facility to facility, and there has been little in the way of in-person training on protocols.<sup>2</sup> These sorts of situations can create unsafe work environments, which have been documented by frontline health care workers. Ultimately, standardized protocols must be in place for workers, along with flexibility to protect workers as much as possible when the situation on the ground demands nimbleness. We also cannot let patients die when crisis conditions make optimal

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/03/31/824654965/spains-health-staff-are-catching-the-coronavirus-as-protective-gear-runs-short>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/14/coronavirus-hospital-workers-present-sharply-different-pictures-of-preparedness/>

protection impossible. Frontline healthcare workers need to know that their public health officials and employers are all doing their best to protect them, and they must be protected against retaliation for raising concerns about their health and safety on the job.

In addition, a wide range of additional frontline workers face increased COVID risks, and continue to work despite few uniform safety or health standards or protections. Homecare workers are assisting seniors and people with disabilities to live independently. Grocery workers are ensuring that our communities have food to eat. Delivery workers are bringing food to people in isolation and quarantine. Service providers are providing key supports to vulnerable community members. Sanitation workers are keeping hospitals and communities clean and hygienic. Police and corrections officers are keeping our communities safe. First responders are managing crises and community safety. Childcare workers are looking after the children of essential employees. Transportation workers ensure the movement of essential goods, and help low-income frontline workers get to work. Due to their valuable work, these workers are all more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 – and these workers also lack a uniform safety standard.

The Department of Labor has an agency devoted to worker safety and health – the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). OSHA’s responsibility is to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for workers by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training and assistance. Although OSHA has issued an informational guide to COVID-19 in the workplace,<sup>3</sup> there is not a standard approach to implementing proper procedures. The lack of a universal standard of best practices leads to confusion. Some states have utilized the OSHA guidance as a resource on their Department of Health sites,<sup>4</sup> and some have taken a step further to issue tailored guidance and standards specifically for their state.<sup>5</sup> While there may be a shortage of PPE that demands deviation from standards temporarily, a nationally standardized way to protect our frontline workers and reduce the risk of infection helps everyone. We need clear OSHA standards and, where workers are being placed at unnecessary risk, we need OSHA enforcement.

Moreover, our districts and states need additional resources to allow them to provide for the safety of the many public and non-profit workers who perform frontline work. The next COVID-19 package must appropriate funds that can be used to improve worker health and safety resources for frontline workers who are public servants or, as is the case of many homelessness service providers, who work in non-profits that do not have adequate resources.

We are deeply grateful to the healthcare workers and other frontline workers who face a heightened COVID-19 risk. They are on the frontlines of this crisis and deserve to be protected. Moreover, it will be harder to curb the spread of COVID-19 if frontline workers do not have access to whatever optimal protection is available, including during shortages of equipment. While current PPE shortages show the need for flexibilities, we need a national standard that protects our frontline healthcare workers and other frontline workers in the next COVID-19 relief package.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.doh.wa.gov/Coronavirus/Workplace>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.natlawreview.com/article/cal-osh-issues-guidance-covid-19-infection-prevention-childcare-industry>

Sincerely,



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PRAMILA JAYAPAL  
Member of Congress



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KIM SCHRIER, M.D.  
Member of Congress

cc: Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx  
Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Murray

**Also signed by:**

/s/  
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Yvette D. Clarke  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Suzan DelBene  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Adriano Espaillat  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Deb Haaland  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

/s/  
David N. Cicilline  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ted Deutch  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jesús G. "Chuy" García  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Brian Higgins  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Derek Kilmer  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Andy Levin  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Alan Lowenthal  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jerry McNerney  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Mark Takano  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Lauren Underwood  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Frederica S. Wilson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Denny Heck  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Mary Gay Scanlon  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Adam Smith  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Bennie G. Thompson  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Susan Wild  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Kathy Castor  
Member of Congress

/s/  
James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress